Keeping the Breath in Mind & Lessons in Samadhi

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&
Lessons In Samādhi

BY

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(Phra Suddhidhammaraṅsī Gambhīramedhācariya)

Translated from the Thai
by
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Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

Translator's Foreword

This is a 'how to' book. It teaches the liberation of the mind, not as a mind-boggling theory, but as a very basic skill that starts with keeping the breath in mind.

The teachings here are drawn from the works of Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo (1906–61), one of Thailand's most renowned teachers of Buddhist meditation practices. Ajaan Lee was a forest monk—one who prefers to live in the seclusion of the forest and makes meditation the central theme of his practice—so his teachings grow out of personal, practical experience, although he also makes a point of relating them to standard Buddhist doctrine.

The book is in two parts: The first is a basic guide to the techniques of breath meditation—Ajaan Lee's speciality—and gives two methods which he developed at separate points in his career. The second part consists of excerpts from five of his talks dealing with many of the issues that arise in the course of meditation.

If you want to begin your practice of meditation immediately and fill in the details later, turn to Method 2. Read over the seven basic steps until you have them firmly in mind, and then begin meditating.

Take care, especially at the beginning, not to clutter your mind with extraneous ideas or information. Otherwise, you might spend too much time looking for things in your meditation, and not see what is actually there. The rest of the book can wait until later, when you want help with a particular problem or—what is often the same thing—when you want an overall perspective on what you are doing.

The purpose of this book is to suggest possibilities: to direct your attention to areas you may have overlooked, to suggest approaches that otherwise might not have occurred to you. What you actually see is purely an individual matter. Don't try to force things. Don't be worried if you have experiences that aren't covered in the book. Don't be disappointed if you don't have experiences that are.

Signs and visions, for example: Some people experience them, others don't. They are an individual matter, and not really essential to the meditation. If you experience them, learn how to use them wisely. If you, don't, learn how to use what you do experience. Most of all, keep the basics in mind and stay observant.

Meditation, like carpentry, sailing or any other skill, has its own vocabulary which to the beginner is bound to seem like a code. One of the challenges in using this book will be in breaking its code. Part

of the difficulty is that some of the terms are literally foreign: They are in Pali, the language of the oldest extant Buddhist texts, colored by shades of meaning they've picked up from Thai. This problem, though, is relatively minor. Most of these terms are explained in the text, and the glossary at the back of the book gives definitions for any that aren't, and additional information on many that are.

A greater challenge lies in getting a feel for the author's point of view. In meditation, we are dealing with the body and mind as experienced from the inside. Ajaan Lee practiced meditation most of his adult life. He had long experience in viewing the body and mind from that perspective, and so it is only natural that his choice of terms should reflect it.

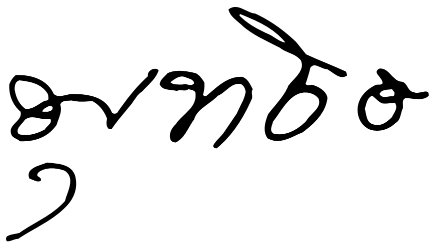
For example, when he refers to the breath or breath sensations, he is speaking not only of the air going in and out of the lungs, but also of the way breathing feels, from the inside, throughout the entire body. Similarly, the 'elements' (*dhātu*) of the body are not the chemical elements. Instead, they are elementary feelings—energy, warmth, liquidity, solidity, emptiness and cognizance—the way the body presents itself directly to inner awareness. The only way to get past the strangeness of this sort of terminology is to start exploring your own body

and mind from the inside, and to gain a sense of which terms apply to which of your own personal experiences. Only then will these terms fulfil their intended purpose—as tools for refining your inner sensitivities—for the truth of meditation lies, not in understanding the words, but in mastering the skill the leads to a direct understanding of awareness itself.

You might compare this book to a recipe. If you simply read the recipe, you can't—even if you understand all the terms—get any flavor or nourishment from it. If you follow the first few steps and then give up when it starts getting difficult, you've wasted your time. But if you follow it all the way, you can then set it aside and simply enjoy the results of your own cooking.

My hope is that this book will be helpful in your personal exploration into the benefits that come from keeping the breath in mind.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)
Rayong, Thailand
October, 1989



INTRODUCTION

This book is a guide to the practice of centering the mind. There are two sections: The first deals almost exclusively with the mind. But since the well-being of the mind depends to some extent on the body, I have included a second section, which shows how to use the body to benefit the mind.

From what I've observed in my own practice, there is only one path which is short, easy, effective and pleasant, and at the same time has hardly anything to lead you astray: the path of keeping the breath in mind, the same path the Lord Buddha himself used with such good results. I hope that you won't make things difficult for yourself by being hesitant or uncertain, by taking this or that teaching from here or there; and that, instead, you'll earnestly set your mind on getting in touch with your own breath and following it as far as it can take you. From there, you'll enter the stage of liberating insight, leading to the mind itself. Ultimately, pure knowing—buddha—will stand out on its own. That's when you'll reach an attainment trustworthy and sure. In other words, if you let the breath follow its own nature, and the mind its own nature, the

results of your practice will without a doubt be all that you hope for.

Ordinarily, the nature of the heart, if it isn't trained and put into order, is to fall-in with pre-occupations that are stressful and bad. This is why we have to search for a principle—a Dhamma—with which to train ourselves if we hope for happiness that's stable and secure. If our hearts have no inner principle, no center in which to dwell, we're like a person without a home. Homeless people have nothing but hardship. The sun, wind, rain and dirt are bound to leave them constantly soiled because they have nothing to act as shelter. To practice centering the mind is to build a home for yourself: Momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*) is like a house roofed with thatch; threshold concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), a house roofed with tile; and fixed penetration (*appanā samādhi*), a house built out of brick. Once you have a home, you'll have a safe place to keep your valuables. You won't have to put up with the hardships of watching over them, the way a person who has no place to keep his valuables has to go sleeping in the open, exposed to the sun and rain, to guard those valuables—and even then his valuables aren't really safe.

So it is with the uncentered mind: It goes searching for good from other areas, letting its

thoughts wander around in all kinds of concepts and preoccupations. Even if those thoughts are good, we still can't say that we're safe. We're like a woman with plenty of jewelry: If she dresses up in her jewels and goes wandering around, she's not safe at all. Her wealth might even lead to her own death. In the same way, if our hearts aren't trained through meditation to gain inner stillness, even the virtues we've been able to develop will deteriorate easily, because they aren't yet securely stashed away in the heart. To train the mind to attain stillness and peace, though, is like keeping your valuables in a strongbox.

This is why most of us don't get any good from the good that we do: We let the mind fall under the sway of its various preoccupations. These preoccupations are our enemies, because there are times when they can cause the virtues we already have to wither away. The mind is like a blooming flower: If wind and insects disturb the flower, it may never have a chance to give fruit. The flower here stands for the stillness of the mind on the path; and the fruit, for the happiness of the path's fruition. If our stillness of mind and happiness are constant, we have a chance to attain the ultimate good we all hope for.

The ultimate good is like the heartwood of a tree. Other 'goods' are like the buds, branches and leaves. If we haven't trained our hearts and minds,

we'll meet with things that are good only on the external level. But if our hearts are pure and good within, everything external will follow in becoming good as a result. Just as our hand, if it's clean, won't soil what it touches, but if it's dirty, will spoil even the cleanest cloth; in the same way, if the heart is defiled, everything is defiled. Even the good we do will be defiled, because the highest power in the world—the sole power which gives rise to all good and evil, pleasure and pain—is the heart. The heart is like a god. Good, evil, pleasure and pain come entirely from the heart. We could even call the heart a creator of the world, because the peace and continued well-being of the world depend on the heart. If the world is to be destroyed, it will be because of the heart. So we should train this most important part of the world to have a center as a foundation for its wealth and wellbeing.

Centering the mind is a way of gathering together all its worthwhile potentials. When these potentials are gathered in the right proportions, they'll give you the strength you need to destroy your enemies: all your defilements and unwise mental states. You have discernment which you've trained and made wise in the ways of good and evil, of the world and the Dhamma. Your discernment is like gunpowder. But if you keep your gunpowder for long without putting

it into bullets—i.e. a centered mind—it'll go damp and moldy. Or if you're careless and let the fires of greed, anger or delusion overcome you, your gunpowder may flame up in your hands. So don't delay: Put your gunpowder into bullets so that whenever your enemies—your defilements—make an attack, you'll be able to shoot them right down.

Whoever trains the mind to be centered gains a refuge. A centered mind is like a fortress. Discernment is like a weapon. To practice centering the mind is to secure yourself in a fortress, and so is something very worthwhile and important. Virtue, the first part of the Path; and discernment, the last, aren't especially difficult. But keeping the mind. centered, which is the middle part, takes some effort because it's a matter of forcing the mind into shape. Admittedly, centering the mind—like placing bridge pilings in the middle of a river—is something difficult to do. But once the mind is firmly in place, it can be very useful in developing virtue and discernment. Virtue is like placing pilings on the near shore of the river; discernment, like placing them on the far shore. But if the middle pilings—a centered mind—aren't firmly in place, how will you ever be able to bridge the flood of suffering?

There is only one way we can properly reach the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and

that's through the practice of mental development (*bhāvanā*). When we develop the mind to be centered and still, discernment can arise. Discernment here refers not to ordinary discernment, but to the insight which comes solely from dealing directly with the mind. For example, the ability to remember past lives, to know where living beings are reborn after death, and to cleanse the heart of the effluents (*āsava*) of defilement: These three forms of intuition—termed *ñāṇa-cakkhu*, the eye of the mind—can arise for people who train themselves in the area of the heart and mind. But if we go around searching for knowledge from sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations mixed together with concepts, it's as if we were studying with the Six Masters, just as the Buddha, while he was studying with the Six Masters, wasn't able to gain Awakenment. He then turned his attention to his own heart and mind, and went off to practice on his own, keeping track of his breath as his first step, and going all the way to the ultimate goal. As long as you're still searching for knowledge from your six senses, you're studying with the Six Masters. But when you focus your attention on the breath—which exists in each of us—to the point where the mind settles down and is centered, you'll have the chance to meet with the real thing: *buddha*, pure knowing.

Some people believe that they don't have to practice centering the mind, that they can attain release through discernment (*paññā-vimutti*) by working at discernment alone. This simply isn't true. Both release through discernment and release through stillness of mind (*ceto-vimutti*) are based on centering the mind. They differ only in degree. Like walking: Ordinarily, a person doesn't walk on one leg alone. Whichever leg is heavier is simply a matter of personal habits and traits.

Release through discernment begins by pondering various events and aspects of the world until the mind slowly comes to rest and, once it's still, gives rise intuitively to liberating insight (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*)—clear and true understanding in terms of the four Noble Truths (*ariya sacca*). In release through stillness of mind, though, there's not much pondering involved. The mind is simply forced to be quiet until it attains the stage of fixed penetration. That's where intuitive insight will arise, enabling it to see things for what they are. This is release through stillness of mind: Concentration comes first, discernment later.

A person with a wide-ranging knowledge of the texts, well-versed in their letter and meaning, capable of clearly and correctly explaining various points of doctrine, but who hasn't developed an

inner center for the mind, is like a pilot flying about in an airplane with a clear view of the clouds and stars but no sense of where the landing strip is: He's headed for trouble. If he flies higher, he'll run out of air. All he can do is keep flying around until he runs out of fuel and comes crashing down in the savage wilds.

Some people, even though they are highly educated, are no better than savages in their behavior. This is because they've gotten carried away, up in the clouds. Some people—taken with what they feel to be the high level of their own learning, ideas and opinions—won't practice centering the mind because they feel it beneath them. They think they deserve to go straight to release through discernment instead. Actually, they're heading straight to disaster, like the airplane pilot who has lost sight of the landing strip.

To practice centering the mind is to build a landing strip for yourself. Then, when discernment comes, you'll be able to attain release safely.

This is why we have to develop all three parts of the path—virtue, concentration and discernment—if we want to be complete in our practice of the religion. Otherwise, how can we say that we know the four Noble Truths?—because the path, to qualify as the Noble Path, has to be composed of virtue, concentra-

tion and discernment. If we don't develop it within ourselves, how can we know it? If we don't know, how can we let go?

Most of us, by and large, like getting results but don't like laying the groundwork. We may want nothing but goodness and purity, but if we haven't completed the groundwork, we'll have to keep on being poor. Like people who are fond of money but not of work: How can they be good, solid citizens? When they feel the pinch of poverty, they'll turn to corruption and crime. In the same way, if we aim at results in the field of the religion but don't like doing the work, we'll have to continue being poor. And as long as our hearts are poor, we're bound to go searching for goodness in other areas—greed, gain, status, pleasure and praise, the baits of the world—even though we know better. This is because we don't truly know—which means simply that we aren't true in what we do.

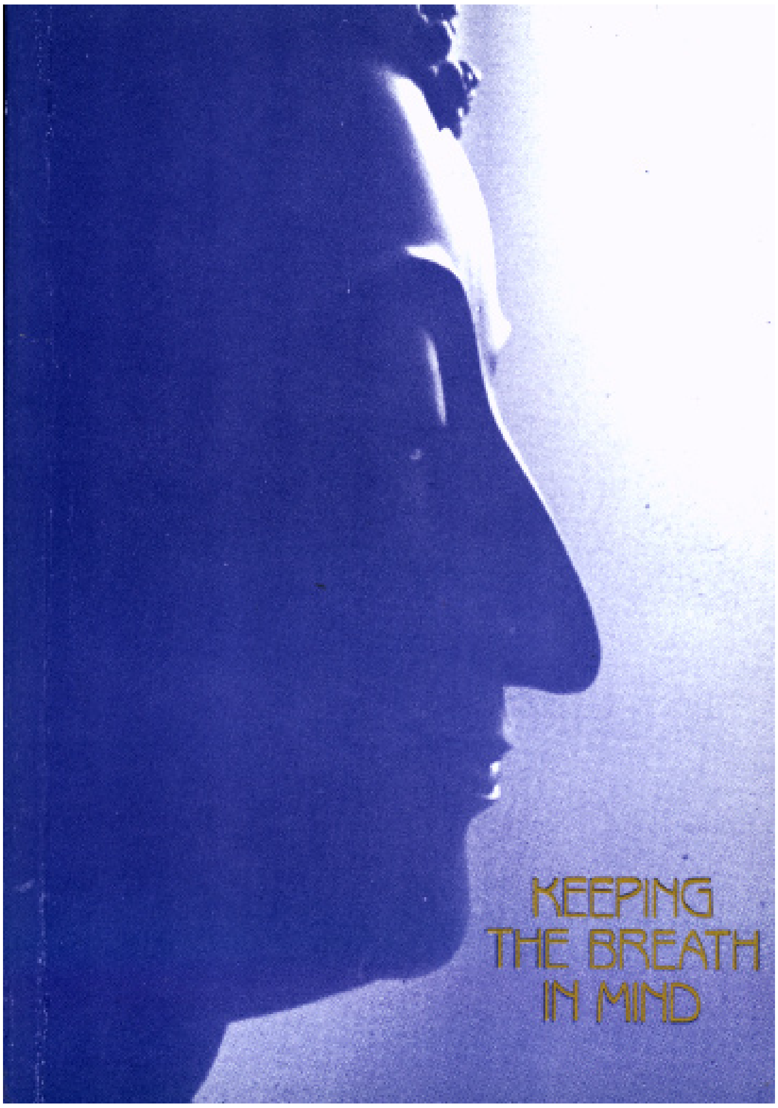
The truth of the path is always true: Virtue is something true, concentration is true, discernment is true, release is true. But if we aren't true, we won't meet with anything true. If we aren't true in practicing virtue, concentration and discernment, we'll end up only with things that are fake and imitation. And when we make use of things fake and imitation, we're headed for trouble. So we have to be true in

our hearts. When our hearts are true, we'll come to savor the taste of the Dhamma, a taste surpassing all the tastes of the world.

This is why I have put together the following two guides for keeping the breath in mind.

Peace.

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo
Wat Boromnivas Bangkok, 1953



Preliminaries

Now I will explain how to go about the practice of centering the mind. Before starting out, kneel down with your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart, and sincerely pay respect to the Triple Gem, saying as follows:

Arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho bhagavā:
Taṃ bhagavantaṃ abhivādemi. (bow down)
Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo:
Taṃ dhammaṃ namassāmi. (bow down)
Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho:
Taṃ saṅghaṃ namāmi. (bow down)

Then, showing respect with your thoughts, words and deeds, pay homage to the Buddha:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. (three times)

And take refuge in the Triple Gem:

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Then make the following resolution: 'I take refuge in the Buddha—the Pure One, completely free from defilement; and in his Dhamma—doctrine, practice and attainment; and in the Sangha—the four levels of his Noble Disciples—from now to the end of my life.'

Buddhaṃ jīvitaṃ yāva nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Dhammaṃ jīvitaṃ yāva nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.
Saṅghaṃ jīvitaṃ yāva nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Then formulate the intention to observe the five, eight, ten or 227 precepts—according to how many you are normally able to observe—expressing them in a single vow:

Imāni pañca sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi.
(three times)

(This is for those observing the five precepts, and means, 'I undertake the five training rules: to refrain from taking life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from lying and from taking intoxicants.)

Imāni aṭṭha sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi.
(three times)

(This is for those observing the eight precepts, and means, 'I undertake the eight training rules: to refrain from taking life, from stealing, from sexual intercourse, from lying, from taking intoxicants, from eating food after noon and before dawn, from watching shows and from adorning the body for the purpose of beautifying it, and from using high and luxurious beds and seats!)

Imāni dasa sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi.
(three times)

(This is for those observing the ten precepts, and means, 'I undertake the ten training rules: to refrain from taking life, from stealing, from sexual intercourse, from lying, from taking intoxicants, from eating food after noon and before dawn, from watching shows, from adorning the body for the purpose of beautifying it, from using high and luxurious beds and seats, and from receiving money.')

Parisuddho ahaṃ bhante. Parisuddhoti maṃ buddho dhammo saṅgho dhāretu.

(This is for those observing the 227 precepts.)

Now that you have professed the purity of your thoughts, words and deeds towards the qualities of

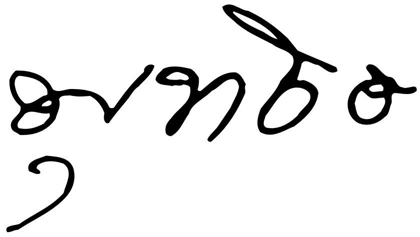
the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, bow down three times. Sit down, place your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart, steady your thoughts, and develop the four Divine Attitudes: good will, compassion, appreciation and equanimity. To spread these thoughts to all living beings without exception is called the immeasurable Divine Attitude. A short Pali formula for those who have trouble memorizing is:

"*Mettā*" (benevolence and love, hoping for your own welfare and that of all other living beings.)

"*Karuṇā*" (compassion for yourself and others.)

"*Muditā*" (appreciation, taking delight in your own goodness and that of others.)

"*Upekkhā*" (equanimity in the face of those things which should be let be.)



Method 1

Sit in a half-lotus position, right leg on top of the left leg, your hands placed palm-up on your lap, right hand on top of the left. Keep your body straight, and your mind on the task before you. Raise your hands in respect, palm-to-palm in front of the heart, and think of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha: "*Buddho me nātho*—The Buddha is my mainstay. *Dhammo me nātho*—The Dhamma is my mainstay. *Saṅgho me nātho*—The Sangha is my mainstay." Then repeat in your mind, *buddho*, *buddho*; *dhammo*, *dhammo*; *saṅgho*, *saṅgho*. Return your hands to your lap, and repeat one word, *buddho*, three times in your mind.

Then think of the in-and-out breath, counting the breaths in pairs. First think *bud* with the in-breath, *dho* with the out, ten times. Then begin again, thinking *buddho* with the in breath, *buddho* with the out, seven times. Then begin again: As the breath goes in and out once, think *buddho* once, five times. Then begin again: As the breath goes in and out once, think *buddho* three times. Do this for three in-and-out-breaths.

Now you can stop counting the breaths, and simply think *bud* with the in-breath and *dho* with

the out. Let the breath be relaxed and natural. Keep your mind perfectly still, focused on the breath as it comes in and out of the nostrils. When the breath goes out, don't send the mind out after it. When the breath comes in, don't let the mind follow it in. Let your awareness be broad and open. Don't force the mind too much. Relax. Pretend that you're breathing out in the wide open air. Keep the mind still, like a post at the edge of the sea. When the water rises, the post doesn't rise with it; when the water ebbs, the post doesn't sink.

When you've reached this level of stillness, you can stop thinking *buddho*. Simply be aware of the feeling of the breath.

Then slowly bring your attention inward, focusing it on the various aspects of the breath—the important aspects that can give rise to intuitive powers of various kinds: clairvoyance, clairaudience, the ability to know the minds of others, the ability to remember previous lives, the ability to know where different people and animals are reborn after death, and knowledge of the various elements or potentials that are connected with, and can be of use to, the body.

These elements come from the bases of the breath. The First Base: Center the mind on the tip of the nose, and then slowly move it to the middle

of the forehead, The Second Base. Keep your awareness broad. Let the mind rest for a moment at the forehead, and then bring it back to the nose. Keep moving it back and forth between the nose and the forehead—like a person climbing up and down a mountain—seven times. Then let it settle at the forehead. Don't let it go back to the nose.

From here, let it move to The Third Base, the middle of the top of the head, and let it settle there for a moment. Keep your awareness broad. Inhale the breath at that spot, let it spread throughout the head for a moment, and then return the mind to the middle of the forehead. Move the mind back and forth between the forehead and the top of the head seven times, finally letting it rest on the top of the head.

Then bring it into The Fourth Base, the middle of the brain. Let it be still for a moment, and then bring it back out to the top of the head. Keep moving it back and forth between these two spots, finally letting it settle in the middle of the brain. Keep your awareness broad. Let the refined breath in the brain spread to the lower parts of the body.

When you reach this point you may find that the breath starts giving rise to various signs (*nimitta*), such as seeing or feeling hot, cold or tingling sensations in the head. You may see a pale, murky

vapor, or your own skull. Even so, don't let yourself be affected by whatever appears. If you don't want the *nimitta* to appear, breathe deep and long, down into the heart, and it will immediately go away.

When you see that a *nimitta* has appeared, mindfully focus your awareness on it—but be sure to focus on only one at a time, choosing whichever one is most comfortable. Once you've got hold of it, expand it so that it's as large as your head. The bright white *nimitta* is useful to the body and mind: It's a pure breath which can cleanse the blood in the body, reducing or eliminating feelings of pain.

When you have this white light as large as the head, bring it down to The Fifth Base, the center of the chest. Once it's firmly settled, let it spread out to fill the chest. Make this breath as white and as bright as possible, and then let both the breath and the light spread throughout the body, out to every pore, until different parts of the body appear on their own as pictures. If you don't want the pictures, take two or three long breaths, and they'll disappear. Keep your awareness still and expansive. Don't let it latch onto or be affected by any *nimitta* that may happen to pass into the brightness of the breath. Keep careful watch over the mind. Keep it one. Keep it intent on a single preoccupation, the refined breath, letting this refined breath suffuse the entire body.

When you've reached this point, knowledge will gradually begin to unfold. The body will be light, like fluff. The mind will be rested and refreshed—supple, solitary and self-contained. There will be an extreme sense of physical pleasure and mental ease.

If you want to acquire knowledge and skill, practice these steps until you're adept at entering, leaving and staying in place. When you've mastered them, you'll be able to give rise to the *nimitta* of the breath—the brilliantly white ball or lump of light—whenever you want. When you want knowledge, simply make the mind still and let go of all preoccupations, leaving just the brightness. Think one or two times of whatever you want to know—of things inside or outside, concerning yourself or others—and the knowledge will arise, or a mental picture will appear. To become thoroughly expert you should, if possible, study directly with someone who has practiced and is skilled in these matters, because knowledge of this sort can come only from the practice of centering the mind.

The knowledge that comes from centering the mind falls into two classes: mundane (*lokiya*) and transcendent (l*okuttara*). With mundane knowledge, you're attached to your knowledge and views on the one hand, and to the things which appear and give rise to your knowledge on the other. Your knowledge

and the things that give you knowledge through the power of your skill are composed of true and false mixed together—but the 'true' here is true simply on the level of mental fashioning, and anything fashioned is by nature changeable, unstable and inconstant.

So when you want to go on to the transcendent level, gather all the things you know and see into a single point—*ekaggatārammaṇa*, the one-pointedness of mental absorption—and see that they are all of the same nature. Take all your knowledge and awareness and gather it into the same point, until you can clearly see the truth: that all of these things, by their nature, simply arise and fall away. Don't try to latch onto the things you know—your preoccupations—as yours. Don't try to latch onto the knowledge that has come from within you as your own. Let these things be, in line with their own inherent nature., If you latch onto your preoccupations, you're latching onto stress and pain. If you hold onto your knowledge, it will turn into the cause of stress.

So: A mind centered and still gives rise to knowledge. This knowledge is the path. All of the things that come passing by for you to know are stress. Don't let the mind fasten onto its knowledge. Don't let it fasten onto the preoccupations which appear for

you to know. Let them be, in line with their nature. Put your mind at ease. Don't fasten onto the mind, or suppose it to be this or that. As long as you suppose yourself, you're suffering from obscured awareness (*avijjā*). When you can truly know this, the transcendent will arise within you—the noblest good, the most exalted happiness a human being can know.

To summarize, the basic steps to practice are as follows:

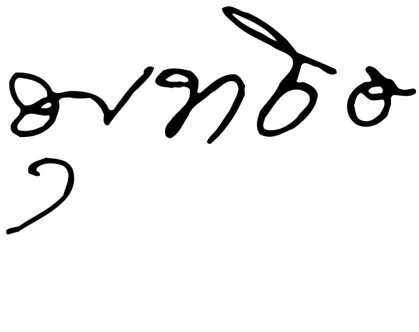
1. Eliminate all bad preoccupations from the mind.
2. Make the mind dwell on good preoccupations.
3. Gather all good preoccupations into one—the one pointedness of meditative absorption (*jhāna*).
4. Consider this one preoccupation until you see how it is aniccaṃ, inconstant; *dukkhaṃ*, stressful; and *anattā*, not yourself or anyone else—empty and void.
5. Let all good and bad preoccupations follow their own nature—because good and bad dwell together, and are equal by nature.

> Let the mind follow its own nature. Let knowing follow its own nature. Knowing doesn't arise, and it doesn't fall away. This is santi-dhamma—the reality of peace. It knows goodness, but the knowing isn't goodness, and goodness isn't the knowing. It knows evil, but the knowing isn't evil, and evil isn't the knowing. In other words, knowing isn't attached to knowledge or to the things known. Its nature is truly elemental—flawless and pure, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. This is why it's called *asaṅkhata-dhātu*: the unfashioned property, a true element.

When you can follow these five steps, you'll find marvels appearing in your heart, the results of having practiced tranquility and insight meditation. These results fall into the two classes already mentioned: mundane, providing for your own physical well-being and that of others throughout the world; and transcendent, providing for the wellbeing of your heart, bringing happiness which is calm, cool and blooming, leading all the way to Liberation (*nibbāna*)—free from birth, ageing, illness and death. This has been a brief explanation of the main principles of breath meditation. If you have any questions or encounter

any difficulties in putting these principles into practice, and you wish to study directly with someone who teaches along these lines, I will be happy to help you to the best of my ability so that we can all attain the peace and well-being taught by the religion.

Most people will find that Method 2, which follows, is easier and more relaxing than Method 1, outlined above.



Method 2

There are seven basic steps:

1. Start out with three or seven long in-and-out breaths, thinking *bud* with the in-breath, and *dho* with the out. Keep the meditation syllable as long as the breath.

2. Be clearly aware of each in-and-out breath.

3. Observe the breath as it goes in and out, noticing whether it's comfortable or uncomfortable, broad or narrow, obstructed or free-flowing, fast or slow, short or long, warm or cool. If the breath doesn't feel comfortable, change it until it does. For instance, if breathing in long and out long is uncomfortable, try breathing in short and out short. As soon as you find that your breathing feels comfortable, let this comfortable breath sensation spread to the different parts of the body.

To begin with, inhale the breath sensation at the base of the skull, and let it flow all the way down the spine. Then, if you are male, let it spread down your

right leg to the sole of your foot, to the ends of your toes, and out into the air. Inhale the breath sensation at the base of the skull again and let it spread down your spine, down your left leg to the ends of your toes and out into the air. (If you are female, begin with the left side first, because the male and female nervous systems are different.)

Then let the breath from the base of the skull spread down over both shoulders, past your elbows and wrists, to the tips of your fingers and out into the air.

Let the breath at the base of the throat spread down the central nerve at the front of the body, past the lungs and liver, all the way down to the bladder and colon.

Inhale the breath right at the middle of the chest and let it go all the way down to your intestines.

Let all these breath sensations spread so that they connect and flow together, and you'll feel a greatly improved sense of well-being.

4. Learn four ways of adjusting the breath:

   a. in long and out long,
   b. in short and out short,
   c. in short and out long,
   d. in long and out short.

Breathe whichever way is most comfortable for you. Or, better yet, learn to breathe comfortably all four ways, because your physical condition and your breath are always changing.

5. Become acquainted with the bases or focal points for the mind—the resting spots of the breath—and center your awareness on whichever one seems most comfortable. A few of these bases are:

   a. the tip of the nose,
   b. the middle of the head,
   c. the palate,
   d. the base of the throat,
   e. the breastbone (the tip of the sternum),
   f. the navel (or a point just above it).

If you suffer from frequent headaches or nervous problems, don't focus on any spot above the base of the throat. And don't try to force the breath or put yourself into a trance. Breathe freely and naturally. Let the mind be at ease with the breath—but not to the point where it slips away.

6. Spread your awareness—your sense of conscious feeling—throughout the entire body.

7. Unite the breath sensations throughout the body, letting them flow together comfortably, keeping your awareness as broad as possible. Once you are fully aware of the aspects of the breath you already know in your body, you'll come to know all sorts of other aspects as well. The breath, by its nature, has many facets: breath sensations flowing in the nerves, those flowing around and about the nerves, those spreading, from the nerves to every pore. Beneficial breath sensations and harmful ones are mixed together by their very nature.

To summarize: (a) for the sake of improving the energy already existing in every part of your body, so that you can contend with such things as disease and pain; and (b) for the sake of clarifying the knowledge already within you, so that it can become a basis for the skills leading to release and purity of heart—you should always bear these seven steps in mind, because they are absolutely basic to every aspect of breath meditation. When you've mastered them, you will have cut a main road. As for the side roads—the incidentals of breath meditation—there are plenty of them, but they aren't really important.

You'll be perfectly safe if you stick to these seven steps and practice them as much as possible.

Once you've learned to put your breath in order, it's as if you have everyone in your home in order. The incidentals of breath meditation are like people outside your home—i.e. guests. Once the people in your home are well-behaved, your guests will have to fall in line.

The 'guests' here are the signs (*nimitta*) and vagrant breaths that will tend to pass within the range of the breath you are dealing with: the various signs that arise from the breath and may appear as images—bright lights, people, animals, yourself, others; or as sounds—the voices of people, some you recognize and others you don't. In some cases the signs appear as smells—either fragrant, or else foul like a corpse. Sometimes the in-breath can make you feel so full throughout the body that you have no sense of hunger or thirst. Sometimes the breath can send warm, hot, cold or tingling sensations through the body. Sometimes it can cause things which never occurred to you before to spring suddenly to mind.

All of these things are classed as guests. Before you go receiving guests, you should put your breath and mind into good order, making them stable and secure. In receiving these guests, you first have to bring them under your control. If you can't control

them, don't have anything to do with them: They might lead you astray. But if you can put them through their paces, they can be of use to you later on.

To put them through their paces means to change them at will, through the power of thought (*paṭibhāga nimitta*)—making them small, large, sending them far away, bringing them up close, making them appear and disappear, sending them outside, bringing them in. Only then will you be able to use them in training the mind.

Once you have mastered these signs, they'll give rise to heightened sensory powers: the ability to see without opening your eyes; the ability to hear far-distant sounds or smell far-distant aromas; the ability to taste the various elements that exist in the air and can be of use to the body in overcoming feelings of hunger and desire; the ability to give rise to certain feelings at will—to feel cool when you want to feel cool, hot when you want to feel hot, warm when you want to feel warm, strong when you need strength—because the various elements in the world that can be physically useful to you will come and appear in your body.

The mind, too, will be heightened, and will have the power to develop the eye of intuition (*ñāṇa-cakkhu*): the ability to remember previous lives, the ability to know where living beings are reborn after

they die, and the ability to cleanse the heart of the effluents of defilement. If you have your wits about you, you can receive these guests and put them to work in your home.

These are a few of the incidentals of breath meditation. If you come across them in your practice, examine them thoroughly. Don't be pleased by what appears. Don't get upset or try to deny what appears. Keep your mind on an even keel. Stay neutral. Be circumspect. Consider carefully whatever appears, to see whether it's trustworthy or not. Otherwise, it might lead you to mistaken assumptions. Good and evil, right and wrong, high and low: All depend on whether your heart is shrewd or dull, and on how resourceful you are. If you are dull-witted, even high things can become low, and good things evil.

Once you know the various aspects of the breath and its incidentals, you can gain knowledge of the four Noble Truths. In addition, you can relieve physical pains as they arise in your body. Mindfulness is the active ingredient in the medicine; the in-and-out breath is the solvent. Mindfulness can cleanse and purify the breath. A pure breath can cleanse the blood throughout the body, and when the blood is cleansed, it can relieve many of the body's diseases and pains. If you suffer from nervous disorders, for

example, they'll completely disappear. What's more, you'll be able to strengthen the body so that you feel a greater sense of health and well-being.

When the body feels well, the mind can settle down and rest. And once the mind is rested, you gain strength: the ability to relieve all feelings of pain while sitting in meditation, so that you can go on sitting for hours. When the body is free from pain, the mind is free from Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). Body and mind are both strong. This is called *samādhi balaṃ*—the strength of concentration.

When your concentration is strong like this, it can give rise to discernment: the ability to see stress, its cause, its disbanding and the path to its disbanding, all clearly within the breath. This we can explain as follows: The in-and-out breath is stress—the in-breath, the stress of arising; the out-breath, the stress of passing away. Not being aware of the breath as it goes in and out, not knowing the characteristics of the breath, is the cause of stress. Knowing when the breath is coming in, knowing when it's going out, knowing its characteristics clearly—i.e. keeping your views in line with the truth of the breath—is Right View, part of the Noble Path. Knowing which ways of breathing are uncomfortable, knowing how to vary the breath; knowing, 'That way of breathing is uncomfortable; I'll have to breathe like this in order

to feel at ease:' This is Right Attitude. The mental factors which think about and correctly evaluate all aspects of the breath are Right Speech. Knowing various ways of improving the breath; breathing, for example, in long and out long, in short and out short, in short and out long, in long and out short, until you come across the breath most comfortable for you: This is Right Undertaking. Knowing how to use the breath to purify the blood, how to let this purified blood nourish the heart muscles, how to adjust the breath so that it eases the body and soothes the mind, how to breathe so that you feel full and refreshed in body and mind: This is Right Livelihood. Trying to adjust the breath until it soothes the body and mind, and to keep trying as long as you aren't fully at ease, is Right Effort. Being mindful of the in-and-out breath at all times, knowing the various aspects of the breath—the up-flowing breath, the down-flowing breath, the breath in the stomach, the breath in the intestines, the breath flowing along the muscles and out to every pore—keeping track of these things with every in-and-out breath: This is Right Reference. A mind intent only on issues related to the breath, not pulling any other objects in to interfere, until the breath is refined, giving rise to fixed absorption and then liberating insight: This is Right Concentration.

To think of the breath is termed *vitakka*, directed thought. To adjust the breath and let it spread is called *vicāra*, evaluation. When all aspects of the breath flow freely throughout the body, you feel full and refreshed in body and mind: This is *pīti*, rapture. When body and mind are both at rest, you feel serene and at ease: This is *sukha*, pleasure. And once you feel pleasure, the mind is bound to hold fast to a single preoccupation, and not go straying after any others: This is *ekaggatārammaṇa*, one-pointedness. These five factors form the beginning stage of Right Concentration.

When all these parts of the Noble Path—virtue, concentration and discernment—are brought together fully mature in the heart, you gain insight into all aspects of the breath, knowing that, 'Breathing this way gives rise to good mental states. Breathing that way gives rise to bad mental states.' You aren't caught up with the factors—i.e. the breath in all its aspects—that fashion the body, the factors that fashion speech, the factors that fashion the mind, whether for good or for ill. You let them be, in line with their inherent nature: This is the disbanding of stress.

Another, even more brief way to express the four Noble Truths is this: The in-and-out breath is the truth of stress. Not being aware of the in-breath, not

being aware of the out breath: This is the cause of stress—obscured, deluded awareness. Seeing into all aspects of the breath so dearly that you can let them go with no sense of attachment is the disbanding of stress. Being constantly mindful and aware of all aspects of the breath is the path to the disbanding of stress.

When you can do this, you can say that you're correctly following the path of breath meditation. Your awareness is unobscured. You have the skill to know all four Truths clearly. You can attain release. Release is a mind which doesn't cling to low causes and low effects—i.e. stress and its cause; or to high causes and high effects—the disbanding of stress and the high causes and high effects—the disbanding of stress and the path to its disbanding. It's a mind unattached to the things which cause it to know, unattached to knowledge, unattached to knowing. When you can separate these things, you've mastered the skill of release—i.e. when you know what forms the beginning, what forms the end and what lies in between, letting them be as they are on their own, in line with the phrase,

sabbe dhammā anattā:
All phenomena are not-self.

To be attached to the things which cause us to

know—the elements, *khandha*, the senses and their objects—is termed attachment to sensuality (*kāmupādāna*). To be attached to knowledge is termed attachment to views (*diṭṭhupādāna*). To be unacquainted with pure knowing in and of itself (*buddha*) is termed attachment to precepts and procedures (*sīlabbatupādāna*). And when we're attached in this way, we are bound to be deluded by the factors which fashion the body, speech and the mind, all of which arise from obscured awareness.

The Buddha was a complete master of both cause and effect, without being attached either to low causes and low effects, or to high causes and high effects. He was above cause and beyond effect. Stress and ease were both at his disposal, but he was attached to neither of them. He fully knew both good and evil, was fully equipped with both self and not-self, but wasn't attached to any of these things. He had at his disposal the objects which can act as the basis for the cause of

[*Perhaps a page, or a paragraph* (*more than just part of a word*) *has been omitted here in the original booklet – probably left out in printing process.*]

???ment (sic)—was also at his disposal: He knew how to appear either ignorant or shrewd, and how to use both ignorance and shrewdness in his work of spreading the religion. And as for the disbanding of stress, he had it at his disposal, but didn't

cling to it, wasn't attached to it, which is why we can truly say that his mastery was complete.

Before the Buddha was able to let go of these things in this way, he first had to work at giving rise to them in full measure. Only then could he put them aside. He let go from abundance, unlike ordinary people who 'let go' out of poverty. Even though he let these things go, they were still at his disposal. He never dismissed the virtue, concentration and discernment he had worked at perfecting up to the day of his Awakenment. He continued using every aspect of virtue, concentration and discernment to the day he entered total Liberation (*parinibbāna*). Even the moment he was about to '*nibbāna*', he was practicing his full command of concentration—i.e. his total Liberation occurred when he was between the physical and non-physical levels of *jhāna*.

So we shouldn't dismiss virtue, concentration and discernment. Some people won't observe the precepts because they're afraid of getting tied to them. Some people won't practice concentration because they're afraid of becoming ignorant or going insane. The truth of the matter is that normally we're already ignorant, already insane, and that to practice centering the mind is what will end our ignorance and cure our insanity. Once we've trained ourselves properly, we'll give rise to pure discernment, like a cut jewel

which gives off light by its very nature. This is what qualifies as true discernment. It arises for us individually, and is termed *paccattaṃ*: We can give rise to it, and know it, only for ourselves.

Most of us, though, tend to misunderstand the nature of discernment. We take imitation discernment, adulterated with concepts, and use it to smother the real thing, like a man who coats a piece of glass with mercury so that he can see his reflection and that of others, thinking he's found an ingenious way of looking at the truth. Actually, he's nothing more than a monkey looking in a mirror: One monkey becomes two, and will keep playing with its reflection until the mercury wears off, at which point it becomes crestfallen, not knowing what the reflection came from in the first place. So it is when we gain imitation discernment, unwittingly, by thinking and conjecturing in line with the things we think we've perceived: We're headed for sorrow when death meets us face-to-face.

The crucial factor in natural discernment comes solely from training the mind to be like a diamond which gives off its own light—surrounded by radiance whether in dark places or bright. A mirror is useful only in places already well-lit. If you take it into the dark, you can't use it to see your reflection at all. But a cut jewel which gives off its own light is

brilliant everywhere. This is what the Buddha meant when he taught that there are no closed or secret places in the world where discernment can't penetrate. This jewel of discernment is what will enable us to destroy craving, attachment and obscured awareness, and to attain the highest excellence: Liberation—free from pain, death, annihilation and extinction—existing naturally through the reality of deathlessness (*amata-dhamma*).

By and large, we tend to be interested only in discernment and release: At the drop of a hat, we want to start right in with the teachings on stress, inconstancy and not-self—and when this is the case, we'll never get anywhere. Before the Buddha taught that things are inconstant, he had worked at knowing them until they revealed their constancy. Before teaching that things are stressful, he had turned that stress into pleasure and ease. And before teaching that things are not-self; he had turned what is not-self into a self, and so was able to see what is constant and true, lying hidden in what is inconstant, stressful and not-self. He then gathered all of these qualities into one. He gathered all that is inconstant, stressful and not-self into one and the same thing: fashionings (*saṅkhāra*) viewed in terms of the world—a single class, equal everywhere throughout the world. As for what's constant, pleasant and

self, this was another class: fashionings viewed in terms of the Dhamma. And then he let go of both classes, without getting caught up on 'constant' or 'inconstant', 'stress', or 'ease', 'self' or 'not-self'. This is why we can say he attained release, purity and Liberation, for he had no need to latch onto fashionings—whether of the world or of the Dhamma—in any way at all.

This was the nature of the Lord Buddha's practice. But as for our own practice, most of us act as if we have everything figured out beforehand, and have succeeded even before we start. In other words, we want simply to let go and attain peace and release. But if we haven't laid the full groundwork, our letting-go is bound to be lacking: Our peace is bound to be piece-meal, our release is bound to be wrong. Those of us who sincerely mean well and want only the highest good should ask ourselves: Have we laid the proper foundation? If we don't lay the proper foundation for release and letting go, how will we ever be free?

The Buddha taught that virtue can overcome common defilements, the faults which occur by means of word and deed; that concentration can overcome such intermediate defilements as sensual desires, ill will, torpor, restlessness and uncertainty; and that discernment can overcome such subtle defilements as craving, attachment and obscured awareness. Yet

some people whose discernment is sharp, who can clearly explain subtle points of doctrine, can't seem to shake off the more common defilements that even virtue can overcome. This shows that something must be lacking in their virtue, concentration and discernment. Their virtues are probably all on the surface, their concentration splotchy and stained, their discernment a smeared-on gloss—like the glass coated with mercury—which is why they can't attain the goal. Their actions fall under the old saying: Keeping a sword outside the scabbard—i.e. having a way with words and theories, but no center for the mind; laying an egg outside the nest—looking for goodness only outside, without training the mind to be centered; resting a foundation on the sand—trying to find security in things of no substance. All of this is bound to bring disappointment. Such people have yet to find a worthwhile refuge.

So we should lay the groundwork and put the causes into good working order, because all the attainments we hope for come springing from causes.

attanā codayattānaṃ
paṭimaṅse tamattanā

Rouse yourself. Train your own heart.
Start judging your own
in-and-out breath.

Now we will summarize the methods of breath meditation under the headings of *jhāna*.

Jhāna means to be absorbed or focused in a single object or preoccupation, as when we deal with the breath.

1. The first level of *jhāna* has five factors: (a) Directed thought (*vitakka*): Think of the breath until you can recognize it clearly without getting distracted. (b) One-pointedness (*ekaggatārammaṇa*): Keep the mind with the breath. Don't let it stray after other objects. Watch over your thoughts so that they deal only with the breath to the point where the breath becomes comfortable. (The mind becomes one, at rest with the breath.) (c) Evaluation (*vicāra*): Gain a sense of how to let this comfortable breath sensation spread and co-ordinate with the other breath sensations in the body. Let these breath sensations spread until they all merge. Once the body has been soothed by the breath, feelings of pain will grow calm. The body will be filled with good breath energy. (The mind is focused exclusively on issues connected with the breath.)

These three qualities must be brought together to bear on the same stream of breathing for the first level of *jhāna* to arise. This stream of breathing

can then take you all the way to the fourth level of *jhāna*.

Directed thought, one-pointedness and evaluation act as the causes. When the causes are fully ripe, results will appear—(d) rapture (*pīti*): a compelling sense of fullness and refreshment for body and mind, going straight to the heart, independent of all else. (e) Pleasure (*sukha*): physical ease arising from the body's being still and unperturbed (*kāya-passaddhi*); mental contentment arising from the mind's being at ease on its own, unperturbed, serene and exultant (*citta-passaddhi*).

Rapture and pleasure are the results. The factors of the first level of *jhāna* thus come down simply to two sorts: causes and results.

As rapture and pleasure grow stronger, the breath becomes more subtle. The longer you stay focused and absorbed, the more powerful the results become. This enables you to set directed thought and evaluation (the preliminary ground-clearing) aside, and—relying completely on a single factor, one-pointedness—you enter the second level of *jhāna* (*magga-citta*, *phala-citta*).

2. The second level of *jhāna* has three factors: rapture, pleasure and one-pointedness (*magga-citta*). This refers to the state of mind which has tasted the results coming from the first level of *jhāna*. Once you

have entered the second level, rapture and pleasure become stronger because they rely on a single cause, one-pointedness, which looks after the work from here on in: focusing on the breath so that it becomes more and more refined, keeping steady and still with a sense of refreshment and ease for both body and mind. The mind is even more stable and intent than before. As you continue focusing, rapture and pleasure become stronger and begin to expand and contract. Continue focusing on the breath, moving the mind deeper to a more subtle level to escape the motions of rapture and pleasure, and you enter the third level of *jhāna*.

3. The third level of *jhāna* has two factors: pleasure and one-pointedness. The body is quiet, motionless and solitary. No feelings of pain arise to disturb it. The mind is solitary and still. The breath is refined, free-flowing and broad. A radiance—white like cotton wool—pervades the entire body, stilling all feelings of physical and mental discomfort. Keep focused on looking after nothing but the broad, refined breath. The mind is free: No thoughts of past or future disturb it. The mind stands out on its own. The four properties—earth, water, fire and wind—are in harmony throughout the body. You could almost say that they're pure throughout the entire body, because the breath has the strength to control and

take good care of the other properties, keeping them harmonious and coordinated. Mindfulness is coupled with one-pointedness, which acts as the cause. The breath fills the body. Mindfulness fills the body.

Focus on in: The mind is bright and powerful, the body is light. Feelings of pleasure are still. Your sense of the body feels steady and even, with no slips or gaps in your awareness, so you can let go of your sense of pleasure. The manifestations of pleasure grow still, because the four properties are balanced and free from motion. One-pointedness, the cause, has the strength to focus more heavily down, taking you to the fourth level of *jhāna*.

4. The fourth level of *jhāna* has two factors: equanimity (*upekkhā*) and one-pointedness, or mindfulness. Equanimity and one-pointedness on the fourth level of *jhāna* are powerfully focused—solid, stable and sure. The breath element is absolutely quiet, free from ripples and gaps. The mind, neutral and still, lets go of all preoccupations with past and future. The breath, which forms the present, is still, like the ocean or air when they are free from currents or waves. You can know distant sights and sounds, because the breath is even and unwavering, and so acts like a movie screen which gives a clear reflection of whatever is projected onto it. Knowledge arises in the mind: You know but stay

neutral and still. The mind is neutral and still; the breath, neutral and still; past, present and future are all neutral and still. This is true one-pointedness, focused on the unperturbed stillness of the breath. All parts of the breath in the body connect so that you can breathe through every pore. You don't have to breathe through the nostrils, because the in-and-out breath and the other aspects of the breath in the body form a single, unified whole. All aspects of the breath energy are even and full. The four properties all have the same characteristics. The mind is completely still.

> The focus is strong; the light, aglow.
> This is to know the great frame of reference.
> The mind is beaming and bright—
> like the light of the sun,
> which unobstructed by clouds or haze,
> illumines the earth with its rays.

The mind sheds light in all directions. The breath is radiant, the mind fully radiant, due to the focusing of mindfulness.

> The focus is strong; the light, aglow....

The mind has power and authority. All four of the frames of reference are gathered into one. There is

no sense that, That's the body… That's a feeling… That's the mind… That's a mental quality.' There's no sense that they're four. This is thus called the great frame of reference, because none of the four are in any way separate.

> The mind is firmly intent,
> centered and true,
> due to the strength of its focus.

Mindfulness and self-awareness converge into one: This is what is meant by the one path (*ekāyana-magga*)—the concord among the properties and frames of reference, four in one, giving rise to great energy and wakefulness, the purifying inner fire (*tapas*) that can thoroughly dispel all obscuring darkness.

As you focus more strongly on the radiance of the mind, the power that comes from letting go of all preoccupations enables the mind to stand alone. You're like a person who has climbed to the top of a mountain and has the right to see in all directions. The mind's dwelling—the breath, which supports the mind's freedom—is in a heightened state, so the mind is able to see all things fashioned (*saṅkhāra*) dearly in terms of the Dhamma, i.e. as elements, *khandha*, and sense media (*āyatana*). Just as a

person who has taken a camera up in an airplane can take pictures of practically everything below, so a person who has reached this stage (*lokavidū*) can see the world and the Dhamma as the truly are.

In addition, awareness of another sort, in the area of the mind—called liberating insight, or the skill of release—also appears. The elements or properties of the body acquire potency (*kāya-siddhi*); the mind, resilient power. When you want knowledge of the world or the Dhamma, focus the mind heavily and forcefully on the breath. As the concentrated power of the mind strikes the pure element, intuitive knowledge will spring up in that element, just as the needle of a record player, as it strikes a record, will give rise to sounds. Once your mindfulness is focused on a pure object, then if you want images, images will appear; if sounds, sounds will arise, whether near or far, matters of the world or the Dhamma, concerning yourself or others, past, present or future—whatever you want to know. As you focus down, think of what you want to know, and it will appear. This is *ñāṇa*—intuitive sensitivity capable of knowing past, present and future—an important level of awareness which you can know only for yourself. The elements are like radio waves going through the air. If your mind and mindfulness are strong, and your skills

highly developed, you can use those elements to put, yourself in touch with the entire world, so that knowledge can arise within you.

When you have mastered the fourth level of *jhāna*, it can act as the basis for eight skills:

1. *Vipassanā-ñāṇa*: clear intuitive insight into mental and physical phenomena as they arise, remain and disband. This is a special sort of insight, coming solely from training the mind. It can occur in two ways: (a) knowing without ever having thought of the matter; and (b) knowing from having thought of the matter—but not after a great deal of thought, as in the case of ordinary knowledge. Think for an instant and it immediately becomes clear—just as a piece of cotton wool soaked in gasoline, when you hold a match to it, bursts immediately into flame. The intuition and insight here are that fast, and so differ from ordinary discernment.

2. *Manomayiddhi*: the ability to use the mind to influence events.

3. *Iddhividhi*: the ability to display supra-normal powers, e.g. creating images in

certain instances that certain groups of people will be able to see.

4. *Dibbasota*: the ability to hear distant sounds.
5. *Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: the ability to know the level—good or evil, high or low—of other people's minds.
6. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember previous lifetimes. (If you attain this skill, you'll no longer have to wonder as to whether death is followed by annihilation or rebirth.)
7. *Dibbacakkhu*: the ability to see gross and subtle images, both near and far.
8. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the ability to reduce and eliminate the effluents of defilement in the heart.

These eight skills come exclusively from the centering the mind, which is why I have written this condensed guide to concentration and *jhāna*, based on the technique of keeping the breath in mind. If you aspire to the good that can come from these things, you should turn your attention to training your own heart and mind.

Lessons In Samādhi

July 30, 1956

If, when you're sitting, you aren't yet able to observe the breath, tell yourself, 'Now I'm going to breathe in… Now I'm going to breathe out.' In other words, at this stage you're the one doing the breathing. You're not letting the breath come in and go out as it naturally would. If you can keep this in mind each time you breathe, you'll soon be able to catch hold of the breath.

In keeping your awareness inside your body, don't try to imprison it there. That is, don't try to force the mind into a trance, don't try to force the breath or hold it to the point to where you feel uncomfortable or confined. You have to let the mind have its freedom. Simply keep watch over it to make sure that it stays separate from its thoughts. If you try to force the breath and pin the mind down, your body is going to feel restricted and you won't feel at ease in your work. You'll start hurting here and aching there and your legs may fall asleep. So just let the

mind be its natural self, keeping watch to make sure that it doesn't slip out after external thoughts.

When we keep the mind from slipping out after its concepts, and concepts from slipping into the mind, it's like closing our windows and doors to keep dogs, cats and thieves from slipping into our house. What this means is that we close off our sense doors and don't pay any attention to the sights that come in by way of our eyes, the sounds that come in by way of our ears, the smells that come in by way of our nose, the tastes that come in by way of our tongue, the tactile sensations that come in by way of the body and the preoccupations that come in by way of the mind. We have to cut off all the perceptions and concepts—good or bad, old or new—that come in by way of these doors.

Cutting off concepts like this doesn't mean that we stop thinking. It simply means that we bring our thinking inside to put it to good use by observing and evaluating the theme of our meditation. If we put our mind to work in this way, we won't be doing any harm to our self or to our mind. Actually, our mind tends to be working all the time, but the work it gets involved in is usually a lot of fuss and bother without any real substance. So we have to find work of real value for it to do—something that won't harm it, something really worth doing. This is why we're doing

breath meditation, focusing on our breathing, focusing on our mind. Put aside all your other work, and be intent on doing just this and nothing else. This is the sort of attitude you need when you meditate.

The Hindrances that come from our concepts of past and future are like weeds growing in our field. They steal all the nutrients from the soil so that our crops wont have anything to feed on, and they make the place look like a mess. They're of no use at all except as food for the cows and other animals that come wandering through. If you let your field get filled with weeds this way, your crops won't be able to grow. In the same way, if you don't clear your mind of its preoccupation with concepts, you won't be able to make your heart pure.

Concepts are food only for the ignorant people who think they're delicious, but sages don't eat them at all. The five Hindrances—sensual desires, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty—are like different kinds of weeds. Restlessness & anxiety is probably the most poisonous of them, because it makes us distracted, unsettled and anxious all at the same time. It's the kind of weed with thorns and sharp-edged leaves. If you run into it, you're going to end up with a stinging rash all over your body. So if you come across it, destroy it. Don't let it grow in your field at all.

Breath meditation—keeping the breath steadily in mind—is the best method the Buddha taught for wiping out these Hindrances. We use directed thought to focus on the breath, and evaluation to adjust it. Directed thought is like a plow; evaluation, like a harrow. If we keep plowing and harrowing our field, weeds won't have a chance to grow, and our crops are sure to prosper and bear fruit.

The field here is our body. If we put a lot of thought and evaluation into our breathing, the four properties of the body will be balanced and at peace. The body will be healthy and strong, the mind relaxed and wide open, free from Hindrances.

When you've got your field cleared and leveled like this, your crops are sure to prosper. As soon as you bring the mind to the breath, you'll feel a sense of rapture and refreshment. The four bases of attainment (*iddhipāda*)—contentment with the practice, persistence in the practice, intentness and circumspection in your practice—will develop step by step.

These four qualities are like the ingredients in a health tonic. Whoever takes this tonic will have a long life. If you want to die, you don't have to take it, but if you don't want to die, you have to take a lot. The more you take it, the faster the diseases in your mind will disappear.

August 17, 1956

When you sit and meditate, even if you don't gain any intuitive insights, make sure at least that you know this much: When the breath comes in, you know. When it goes out, you know. When it's long, you know. When it's short, you know. Whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, you know. If you can know this much, you're doing fine. As for the various thoughts and concepts (*saññā*) that come into the mind, brush them away—whether they're good or bad, whether they deal with the past or the future. Don't let them interfere with what you're doing—and don't go chasing after them to straighten them out. When a thought of this sort comes passing in, simply let it go passing on. Keep your awareness, unperturbed, in the present.

When we say that the mind goes here or there, it's not really the mind that goes. Only concepts go. Concepts are like shadows of the mind. If the body is still, how will its shadow move? The movement of the body is what causes the shadow to move, and when the shadow moves, how will you catch hold of it? Shadows are hard to catch, hard to shake off, hard to set still. The awareness which forms the present: That's the true mind. The awareness which

goes chasing after concepts is just a shadow. Real awareness—'knowing'—stays in place. It doesn't stand, walk, come or go. As for the mind—the awareness which doesn't act in any way coming or going, forward or back—it's quiet and unperturbed. And when the mind is thus its normal, even, undistracted self—i.e. when it doesn't have any shadows—we can rest peacefully. But if the mind is unstable and uncertain, it wavers: Concepts arise and go flashing out—and we go chasing after them, hoping to drag them back in. The chasing after them is where we go wrong. This is what we have to correct. Tell yourself: Nothing is wrong with your mind. Just watch out for the shadows.

You can't improve your shadow. Say your shadow is black. You can scrub it with soap till your dying day, and it'll still be black—because there's no substance to it. So it is with your concepts. You can't straighten them out, because they're just images, deceiving you.

The Buddha thus taught that whoever isn't acquainted with the self, the body, the mind and its shadows, is suffering from *avijjā*—darkness, deluded knowledge. Whoever thinks the mind is the self, the self is the mind, the mind is its concepts—whoever has everything all mixed up like this—is lost, like a person lost in the jungle. To be lost in the jungle

brings countless hardships. There are wild beasts to worry about, problems in finding food to eat and a place to sleep. No matter which way you look, there's no way out. But if we're lost in the world, it's many times worse than being lost in the jungle, because we can't tell night from day. We have no chance to find any brightness because our minds are dark with *avijjā*.

The purpose of training the mind to be still is to simplify things. When things are simplified, we can see. The mind can settle down and rest. And when the mind has rested, it'll gradually become bright, in and of itself, and give rise to knowledge. But if we let things get complicated—if we let the mind get mixed up with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas—that's darkness. Knowledge won't have a chance to arise.

When intuitive knowledge does arise, it can—if you know how to use it—lead to liberating insight. But if you let yourself get carried away by knowledge of the pastor future, you won't get beyond the mundane level. In other words, if you dabble too much in knowledge of physical things, without gaining wisdom with regard to the workings of the mind, it can leave you spiritually immature.

Say, for example, that a vision arises and you get hooked: You gain knowledge of your past lives and

get all excited. Things you never knew before, now you can know. Things you never saw before, now you see—and they can make you overly pleased or upset. Why? Because you take them all too seriously. You may see a vision of yourself prospering as a lord or master, a great emperor or king, wealthy and influential. If you let yourself feel pleased, that's indulgence in pleasure. You've strayed from the Middle Path. Or you may see yourself as something you wouldn't care to be: a pig or a dog, a bird or a rat, crippled or deformed. If you let yourself get upset, that's indulgence in self-affliction—and again, you've strayed from the path. Some people really let themselves get carried away: As soon as they start seeing things, they begin to think that they're special, somehow better than other people. They let themselves become proud and conceited—and the true path has disappeared without their even knowing it. If you're not careful, this is where mundane knowledge can lead you.

But if you keep one principle finely in mind, you can stay on the right path: Whatever appears, good or bad, true or false, don't let yourself feel pleased, don't let yourself get upset.

Keep the mind balanced and neutral, and discernment will arise. You'll see that the vision or sign displays the truth of stress: It arises (is born), fades (ages) and disappears (dies).

If you get hooked on your intuitions, you're asking for trouble. Knowledge that proves false can hurt you. Knowledge that proves true can **really** hurt you. If what you know is true, and you go telling other people, you're bragging. If it turns out to be false, it can backfire on you. This is why those who truly know say that knowledge is the essence of stress: It can hurt you. Knowledge is part of the flood of views and opinions (*diṭṭhi-ogha*) over which we have to cross. If you hang onto knowledge, you've gone wrong. If you know, simply know, and let it go at that. You don't have to be excited or pleased. You don't have to go telling other people.

People who have studied abroad, when they come back to the rice fields, don't tell what they've learned to the folks at home. They talk about ordinary things in an ordinary way. They don't talk about the things they've studied because (1) no one would understand them; (2) it wouldn't serve any purpose. Even with people who would understand them, they don't display their learning. So it should be when you practice meditation. No matter how much you know, you have to act as if you know nothing—because this is the way people with good manners normally act. If you go bragging to other people, it's bad enough. If they don't believe you, it can get even worse.

So whatever you know, simply be aware of it and let it go. Don't let there be the assumption that 'I know.' When you can do this, your mind can attain the transcendent, free from attachment.

⌗

Everything in the world has its truth. Even things that aren't true are true—i.e. their truth is that they're false. This is why we have to let go of both what's true and what's false. Once we know the truth and can let it go, we can be at our ease. We won't be poor, because the truth—the Dhamma—will still be there with us. We won't be left empty-handed. It's like having a lot of money: Instead of lugging it around with us, we keep it piled up at home. We may not have anything in our pockets, but we're still not poor.

The same is true with people who really know. Even when they let go of their knowledge, it's still there. This is why the minds of the Noble Ones aren't left adrift. They let things go, but not in a wasteful or irresponsible way. They let go like rich people: Even though they let go, they've still got piles of wealth.

As for people who let things go like paupers, they don't know what's worthwhile and what's not, and so they let it all go, throw it all away. And when

they do this, they're simply heading for disaster. For instance, they may see that there's no truth to anything—no truth to the *khandha*, no truth to the body, no truth to stress, its cause, its disbanding or the path to its disbanding, no truth to Liberation. They don't use their brains at all. They're too lazy to do anything, so they let go of everything, throw it all away. This is called letting go like a pauper. Like a lot of modern-day sages: When they come back after they die, they're going to be poor all over again.

As for the Buddha, he let go only of the true and false things which appeared in his body and mind—but he didn't abandon his body and mind, which is why he ended up rich, with plenty of wealth to hand down to his descendants. This is why his descendants never have to worry about being poor.

So we should look to the Buddha as our model. If we see that the *khandha* are worthless—inconstant, stressful, not-self and all that—and simply let go of them by neglecting them, we're sure to end up poor. Like a stupid person who feels so repulsed by a festering sore on his body that he won't touch it, and so lets it go without taking care of it: There's no way the sore is going to heal. As for intelligent people, they know how to wash their sores, put medicine and bandages on them, so that eventually they're sure to recover.

In the same way, when people see only the drawbacks to the *khandha*, without seeing their good side, and so let them go without putting them to any worthwhile use, nothing good will come of it. But if we're intelligent enough to see that the *khandha* have their good side as well as their bad, and then put them to good use by meditating to gain discernment into physical and mental phenomena, we're going to be rich. Once we have the truth—the Dhamma—as our wealth, we won't suffer if we have money, and won't suffer if we don't, because our minds will be transcendent.

August 26, 1957

If feelings of pain or discomfort arise while you're sitting in meditation, examine them to see what they come from. Don't let yourself be pained or upset by them. If there are parts of the body that won't go as you'd like them to, don't worry about them. Let them be—because your body is the same as every other body, human or animal, throughout the world: It's inconstant, stressful and can't be forced. So stay with whatever part does go as you'd like it to, and keep it comfortable.

#

The body is like a tree: No tree is entirely perfect. At any one time it'll have new leaves and old leaves, green leaves and yellow, fresh leaves and dry. The dry leaves will fall away first, while those that are fresh will slowly dry out and fall away later. Some of the branches are long, some thick and some small. The fruits aren't evenly distributed. The human body isn't really much different from this. Pleasure and pain aren't evenly distributed. The parts that ache and those that are comfortable are randomly mixed. You can't rely on it. So do your best to keep the com-

fortable parts comfortable. Don't worry about the parts that you can't make comfortable.

It's like going into a house where the floorboards are beginning to rot: If you want to sit down, don't choose a rotten spot. Choose a spot where the boards are still sound. That is, the heart needn't concern itself with things that can't be controlled.

You can compare the body to a mango: If a mango has a rotten or a wormy spot, take a knife and cut it out. Eat just the good part remaining. If you're foolish enough to eat the wormy part, you're in for trouble. Your body is the same, and not just the body—the mind, too, doesn't always go as you'd like it to. Sometimes it's in a good mood, sometimes it's not. This is where you have to use as much thought and evaluation as possible.

Directed thought and evaluation are like doing a job. The job here is concentration: centering the mind. Focus the mind on a single object and then, giving it your full attention, examine and reflect on it. If you use a meagre amount of thought and evaluation, your concentration will give meagre results. If you do a crude job, you'll get crude results. If you do a fine job, you'll get fine results. Crude results aren't worth much. Fine results are of high quality, and are useful in all sorts of ways—like atomic radiation, which is so fine that it can penetrate even moun-

tains. Crude things are of low quality and hard to use. Sometimes you can soak them in water all day long, and they still don't soften up. But as for fine things, all they need is a little dampness in the air and they dissolve.

So it is with the quality of your concentration. If your thinking and evaluation are subtle, thorough and circumspect, your 'concentration work' will result in more and more stillness of mind. If your thinking and evaluation are slipshod, you won't get much stillness. Your body will ache, and you'll feel restless and irritable. Once the mind can become very still, though, the body will be comfortable and at ease. Your heart will feel open and clear. Pains will disappear. The elements of the body will feel normal: The warmth in your body will be just right, neither too hot nor too cold. As soon as your work is finished, it'll result in the highest form of happiness and ease: *nibbāna*—Liberation. But as long as you still have work to do, your heart won't get its full measure of peace. Wherever you go, there will always be something nagging at the back of your mind. Once your work is done, though, you can be carefree wherever you go.

If you haven't finished your job, it's because (1) you haven't set your mind on it; and (2) you haven't actually done the work—you've shirked your

duties and played truant. If you really set your mind on doing the job, there's no doubt but that you'll finish it.

⌗

Once you've realized that the body is inconstant, stressful and can't be forced, you shouldn't let your mind get upset or excited by it. Keep your mind normal, on an even keel. 'Inconstant' means that it changes. 'Stressful' doesn't refer solely to aches and pains. It refers to pleasure as well—because pleasure is inconstant and undependable. A little pleasure can turn into a lot of pleasure, or into pain. Pain can turn back into pleasure, and so on. (If we had nothing but pain we would die.) So we shouldn't be all that concerned about pleasure and pain. Think of the body as having two parts, like the mango. If you focus your attention on the comfortable part, your mind can be at peace. Let the pains be in the other part. Once you have an object of meditation, you have a comfortable place for your mind to stay. You don't have to dwell on your pains. You have a comfortable house to live in: Why go sleep in the dirt?

⌗

We all want nothing but goodness, but if you can't tell what's good from what's defiled, you can sit and meditate till your dying day and never find *nibbāna* at all. But if you can set your mind and keep your mind on what you're doing, it's not all that hard. *Nibbāna* is really a simple matter, because it's always there. It never changes. The affairs of the world are what's hard, because they're always changing and uncertain. Today they're one way, tomorrow another. Once you've done something, you have to keep looking after it. But you don't have to look after *nibbāna* at all. Once you've realized it, you can let it go. Keep on realizing, keep on letting go—like a person eating rice who, after he's put the rice in his mouth, keeps spitting it out.

What this means is that you keep on doing good but don't claim it as your own. Do good, and then spit it out. This is *virāga-dhamma*: disengagement. For most people in the world, once they've done something, it's theirs—and so they have to keep looking after it. If they're not careful, it'll either get stolen or else wear out on its own. They're headed for disappointment. Like a person who swallows his rice: After he's eaten, he'll have to defecate. After he's defecated he'll be hungry again, so he'll have to eat again and defecate again. The day will never come When he's had enough. But with *nibbāna*, you don't

have to swallow. You can eat your rice and then spit it out. You can do good and let it go. It's like plowing a field: The dirt falls off the plow on its own. You don't need to scoop it up and put it in a bag tied to your water buffalo's leg. Whoever is stupid enough to scoop up the dirt as it falls off the plow and stick it in a bag will never get anywhere. Either his buffalo will get bogged down, or else he'll trip over the bag and fall flat on his face right there in the middle of the field. The field will never get plowed, the rice will never get sown, the crop will never get gathered. He'll have to go hungry.

Buddho, our meditation word, is the name of the Buddha after his Awakenment. It means someone who has blossomed, who is awake, who has suddenly come to his senses. For six long years before his Awakenment, the Buddha traveled about, searching for the truth from various teachers, all without success. So he went off on his own and on a full-moon evening in May sat down under the Bodhi tree, vowing that he wouldn't get up until he had attained the truth. Finally, towards dawn, as he was meditating on his breath, he gained Awakenment.

He found what he was looking for—right at the tip of his nose.

Nibbāna doesn't he far away. It's right at our lips, right at the tip of our nose. But we keep groping around and never find it. If you're really serious about finding purity, set your mind on meditation and nothing else. As for whatever else may come your way, you can say, 'No thanks.' Pleasure? 'No thanks.' Pain? 'No thanks.' Goodness? 'No thanks.' Evil? 'No thanks.' Attainment? 'No thanks.' *Nibbāna*? 'No thanks.' If it's 'no thanks' to everything, what will you have left? You won't need to have anything left. That's *nibbāna*. Like a person without any money: How will thieves be able to rob him?

If you get money and try to hold onto it, you're going to get killed. If this thief doesn't get you, that one will. Carry 'what's yours' around till you're completely weighed down. You'll never get away.

In this world we have to live with both good and evil. People who have developed disengagement are filled with goodness, and know evil fully, but don't hold onto either, don't claim either as their own. They put them aside and let them go, and so can travel light and easy. *Nibbāna* isn't all that difficult a matter. In

the Buddha's time, some people became *arahants* while going on their almsround, some while urinating, some while watching farmers plowing a field. What's difficult about the highest good lies in the beginning, in laying the groundwork—being constantly mindful, examining and evaluating your breath at all times. But if you can keep at it, you're bound to succeed in the end.

May 7, 1959

The breath is a mirror for the mind. If the mirror is abnormal, it gives abnormal reflections. Say you look into a convex mirror: Your reflection will be taller than you are. If you look into a concave mirror, your reflection will be abnormally short. But if you look into a mirror that's flat, smooth and normal, it'll give you a true reflection of yourself.

Knowing how to adjust the breath, putting it in good order, is tantamount to putting the mind in good order as well, and can give all kinds of benefits—like a good cook who knows how to vary the foods she serves, sometimes changing the color, sometimes the flavor, sometimes the shape, so that her employer will never grow tired of her cooking. If she fixes the same thing all year around—porridge today, porridge tomorrow, porridge the next day—her employer is bound to go looking for a new cook. But if she knows how to vary her offerings so that her employer is always satisfied, she's sure to get a raise in her salary, or maybe a special bonus.

So it is with the breath. If you know how to adjust and vary the breath—if you're always thinking about and evaluating the breath—you'll become thoroughly mindful and expert in all matters dealing with the breath and the other elements of the body. You'll always know how things are going with the body. Rapture, ease and one-pointedness will come on their own. The body will be refreshed, the mind content. Both body and mind will be at peace. All the elements will be at peace, free from unrest and disturbances.

It's like knowing how to look after a small child. If the child starts crying, you know when to give it milk or candy, when to give it a bath, when to take it out for some air, when to put it in a playpen and give it a doll to play with. In no time at all, the child will stop crying, stop whining, and leave you free to finish whatever work you have to do. The mind is like a small, innocent child. If you're skilled at looking after it, it'll be obedient, happy and contented, and will grow day by day.

When the body and mind are full and content, they won't feel hungry. They won't have to go opening up the pots and pans on the stove or pace around

looking out the windows and doors. They can sleep in peace without any disturbances. Ghosts and demons—the pains of the *khandha*—won't come and possess them. This way we can be at our ease, because when we sit, we sit with people. When we he down, we he down with people. When we eat, we eat with people. When people live with people, there's no problem; but when they live with ghosts and demons, they're sure to squabble and never find any peace. If we don't know how to evaluate and adjust our breathing, there's no way our meditation will give any results. Even if we sit till we die, we won't gain any knowledge or understanding at all.

There was once an old monk—70 years old, 30 years in the monkhood—who had heard good things about how I teach meditation, and so came to study with me. The first thing he asked was, 'What method do you teach?'

'Breath meditation,' I told him. 'You know —*buddho, bud–dho.*'

As soon as he heard that, he said, 'I've been practicing that method ever since the time of Ajaan Mun—*buddho, buddho* ever since I was young—and I've never seen anything good come of it. All it does is *buddho, buddho* without ever getting anywhere at all. And now you're going to teach me to *buddho* some more. What for? You want me to *buddho* till I die?'

This is what happens when people have no sense of how to adjust and evaluate their breathing: They'll never find what they're looking for—which is why adjusting and spreading the breath is a very important part of doing breath meditation.

Getting to know yourself—becoming acquainted with your body, your mind, the elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space and cognizance), knowing what they come from, how they arise, how they disband, how they are inconstant, stressful and not-self: All of this you have to find out by exploring on your own. If your knowledge simply follows what's in books or what other people tell you, then it's knowledge that comes from labels and concepts, not from your own discernment. It's not really knowledge. If you know only what other people tell you, you're following them down a road—and what could be good about that? They might lead you down the wrong road. And if the road is dusty, they might kick dust into your ears and eyes. So in your search for the truth, don't simply believe what other people say. Don't believe labels. Practice centering the mind until you gain knowledge on your own. Only then will it be insight. Only then will it be trustworthy.

October 4, 1960

When you meditate, you have to think. If you don't think, you can't meditate, because thinking forms a necessary part of meditation. Take *jhāna*, for instance. Use your powers of directed thought to bring the mind to the object, and your powers of evaluation to be discriminating in your choice of an object. Examine the object of your meditation until you see that it's just right for you. You can choose slow breathing, fast breathing, short breathing, long breathing, narrow breathing, broad breathing, hot, cool or warm breathing; a breath that goes only as far as the nose, a breath that goes only as far as the base of the throat, a breath that goes all the way down to the heart. When you've found an object that suits your taste, catch hold of it and—'one-pointedness'—make the mind one, focused on a single object. Once you've done this, evaluate your object. Direct your thoughts to making it stand out. Don't let the mind leave the object. Don't let the object leave the mind. Tell yourself that it's like eating: Put the food in line with your mouth, put your mouth in line with the food. Don't miss. If you miss, and go sticking the food in your ear, under your chin, in your eye or on your forehead, you'll never get anywhere in your eating.

So it is with your meditation. Sometimes the 'one' object of your mind takes a sudden sharp turn into the past, back hundreds of years. Sometimes it takes off into the future, and comes back with all sorts of things to clutter your mind. This is like taking your food, sticking it up over your head, and letting it fall down behind you—the dogs are sure to get it; or like bringing the food to your mouth and then tossing it out in front of you. When you find this happening, it's a sign that your mind hasn't been made snug with its object. Your powers of directed thought aren't firm enough. You have to bring the mind to the object and then keep after it to make sure it stays put. Like eating: Make sure the food is in line with the mouth and stick it right in. This is directed thought: The food is in line with the mouth, the mouth is in line with the food. You're sure it's food, and you know what kind it is—main course or dessert, coarse or refined.

Once you know what's what, and it's in your mouth, chew it right up. This is evaluation: examining, reviewing your meditation. Sometimes this comes under threshold concentration—examining a coarse object to make it more and more refined. If you find that the breath is long, examine long breathing. If it's short, examine short breathing. If it's slow, examine slow breathing—to see if the mind

will stay with that kind of breathing, to see if that kind of breathing will stay with the mind, to see whether or not the breath is smooth and unhindered. This is evaluation.

When the mind gives rise to directed thought and evaluation, you have both concentration and discernment. Directed thought and one-pointedness fall under the heading of concentration; evaluation, under the heading of discernment. When you have both concentration and discernment, the mind is still and knowledge can arise. But if there's too much evaluation, it can destroy your stillness of mind. If there's too much stillness, it can snuff out thought. You have to watch over the stillness of your mind to make sure you have things in the right proportions. If you don't have a sense of 'just right', you're in for trouble. If the mind is too still, your progress will be slow. If you think too much, it'll run away with your concentration.

So observe things carefully. Again, it's like eating. If you go shoveling food into your mouth, you might end up choking to death. You have to ask yourself: Is it good for me? Can I handle it? Are my teeth strong enough? Some people have nothing but empty gums, and yet they want to eat sugar cane: It's not normal. Some people, even though their teeth are aching and falling out, still want to eat crunchy

foods. So it is with the mind: As soon as it's just a little bit still, we want to see this, know that—we want to take on more than we can handle. You first have to make sure that your concentration is solidly based, that your discernment and concentration are properly balanced. This point is very important. Your powers of evaluation have to be ripe, your directed thought firm.

Say you have a water buffalo and tie it to a stake. If your buffalo is strong, it just might walk away with the stake. You have to know your buffalo's strength. If it's really strong, pound the stake so that it's firmly in the ground, and keep watch over it. In other words, if you find that your thinking is getting out of hand, going beyond the bounds of mental stillness, bring the mind back and make it extra still—but not so still that you lose track of things. If the mind is too quiet, it's like being in a daze. You don't know what's going on at all. Everything is dark, blotted out. Or else you have good and bad spells, sinking out of sight and then popping up again. This is concentration without directed thought or evaluation, with no sense of judgment: Wrong Concentration.

So you have to be observant. Use your judgement but don't let the mind get carried away by its thoughts. Your thinking is something separate. The mind stays with the meditation object. Wherever

your thoughts may go spinning, your mind is still firmly based—like holding onto a post and spinning around and around. You can keep on spinning, and yet it doesn't wear you out. But if you let go of the post and spin around three times, you get dizzy and—Bang!—fall flat on your face. So it is with the mind: If it stays with its one object, it can keep thinking and not get tired, because your thinking and stillness are right there together. The more you think, the more solid your mind gets. The more you sit and meditate, the more you think. The mind becomes more and more firm until all the Hindrances (*nīvaraõa*) fall away. The mind no longer goes looking for concepts. Now it can give rise to knowledge.

The knowledge here isn't ordinary knowledge. It washes away your old knowledge. You don't want the knowledge that comes from ordinary thinking and reasoning: Let go of it. You don't want the knowledge that comes from directed thought and evaluation: Stop. Make the mind quiet. Still. When the mind is still and unhindered, this is the essence of all that is good. When your mind is on this level, it isn't attached to any concepts at all. All the concepts you've known—dealing with the world or the Dhamma, however many or few—are washed away. Only when they're washed away can new knowledge arise.

This is why you should let go of concepts—all the labels and names you have for things. You have to let yourself be poor. It's when people are poor that they become resourceful. If you don't let yourself be poor, you'll never gain discernment. In other words, you don't have to be afraid of being stupid or of missing out on things. You don't have to be afraid that you've hit a dead end. You don't want any of the insights you've gained from listening to others or from reading books, because they're concepts, and so they're inconstant. You don't want any of the insights you've gained by reasoning and thinking, because they're concepts, and so they're not-self. Let all these insights disappear, leaving just the mind, firmly intent, leaning neither to the left—towards being displeased; nor to the right—towards being pleased. Keep the mind still, quiet, neutral, impassive—set tall. And there you are: Right Concentration.

When Right Concentration arises in the mind, it has a shadow. When you can catch sight of the shadow appearing, that's *vipassanā*: insight meditation.

The knowledge you gain from Right Concentration doesn't come in the form of thoughts or ideas. It comes as Right Views. What looks wrong to you is really wrong. What looks right is really right. If what looks right is really wrong, that's Wrong View.

If what looks wrong is really right, again—Wrong View. With Right View, though, right looks right and wrong looks wrong.

To put it in terms of cause and effect you see the four Noble Truths. You see stress, and it really is stressful. You see the cause of stress arising, and that it's really causing stress. These are Noble Truths: absolutely, undeniably, indisputably true. You see that stress has a cause. Once the cause arises, there has to be stress. As for the way to the disbanding of stress, you see that the path you're following will, without a doubt, lead to Liberation. Whether or not you go all the way, what you see is correct. This is Right View. And as for the disbanding of stress, you see that there really is such a thing. You see that as long as you're on the path, stress does in fact fall away. When you come to realize the truth of these things in your heart, that's *vipassanā-ñāṇa*.

To put it even more simply: You see that all things, inside as well as out, are undependable. The body is undependable, ageing is undependable, death is undependable. They're slippery characters, constantly changing on you. To see this is to see inconstancy. Don't let yourself be pleased by inconstancy. Don't let yourself be upset. Keep the mind neutral, on an even keel. That's what's meant by *vipassanā*.

As for stress: Say we hear that an enemy is suffering. 'Glad to hear it, we think. 'Hope they hurry up and die.' The heart has tilted. Say we hear that a friend has become wealthy, and we become happy; or a son or daughter is ill, and we become sad. Our mind has fallen in with suffering and stress. Why? Because we're unskilled. The mind isn't centered—i.e. it's not in Right Concentration. We have to look after the mind. Don't let it fall in with stress. Whatever suffers, let it suffer, but don't let the mind suffer with it. The body may be in pain, but the mind isn't pained. Let the body go ahead and suffer, but the mind doesn't suffer. Keep the mind neutral. Don't be pleased by pleasure—pleasure is a form of stress, you know. How so? It can change. It can rise and fall. It can be high and low. It can't last. **That's** stress. Pain is also stress: double stress. When you gain this sort of insight into stress—when you really **see** stress—*vipassanā* has arisen in the mind.

As for *anattā*, not-self: Once we've examined things and seen them for what they really are, we don't make claims, we don't display influence, we don't try to show that we have the right or the power to bring things which are not-self under our control. No matter how hard we try, we can't prevent birth, ageing, illness and death. If the body is going to be old, let it be old. If it's going to hurt, let it hurt. If it's

going to die, let it die. Don't be pleased by death, either your own or that of others. Don't be upset by death, your own or that of others. Keep the mind neutral. Unruffled. Unfazed. This is *saṅkhārūpekkhā-ñāṇa*: letting *saṅkhāra*—all things fashioned, conditioned and caused—follow their own inherent nature.

This, briefly, is *vipassanā*: You see that all things fashioned are inconstant, stressful and not-self. You can disentangle them from your grasp. You can let go. This is where it gets good. How so? You don't have to wear yourself out, lugging *saṅkhāra* around.

To be attached means to carry a load, and there are five heaps (*khandha*) we carry: attachment to physical phenomena, to feelings, to concepts and labels, to mental fashionings and to cognizance. We grab hold and hang onto these things, thinking that they're the self. Go ahead: Carry them around. Hang one load from your left leg and one from your right. Put one on your left shoulder and one on your right. Put the last load on your head. And now: Carry them wherever you go—clumsy, encumbered and comical.

bhārā have pañcakkhandhā

Go ahead and carry them. The five *khandha* are a heavy load,

bhārahāro ca puggalo
and as individuals we burden ourselves with them.

bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke
Carry them everywhere you go, and you waste your time suffering in the world.

The Buddha taught that whoever lacks discernment, whoever is unskilled, whoever doesn't practice concentration leading to liberating insight, will have to be burdened with stress, will always be loaded down. It's a pity. It's a shame. They'll never get away. Their legs are burdened, their shoulders burdened—and where are they going? Three steps forward and two steps back. Soon they'll get discouraged, and then after a while they'll pick themselves up and get going again.

Now, when we see inconstancy—that all things fashioned, whether within us or without, are undependable, when we see that they're stressful; when we see that they're not our self, that they simply whirl around in and of themselves: When we gain these insights, we can put down our burdens, i.e. let go of our attachments. We can put down the past—i.e. stop dwelling in it. We can let go of the future—i.e. stop yearning for it. We can let go of the present—i.e. stop claiming it as the self. Once we've

let our burdens fall, we can walk with a light step. We can even dance. We're beautiful. Wherever we go, people will be glad to know us. Why? Because we're not encumbered. Whatever we do, we can do with ease. We can walk, run, dance and sing—all with a light heart. We're Buddhism's beauty, a sight for sore eyes, graceful wherever we go. No longer burdened, no longer encumbered, we can be at our ease. This is *vipassanā-ñāṇa*.



Appendix

The earliest editions of Keeping the Breath in Mind contain a version of Step 3 in Method 2 which Ajaan Lee later shortened and revised to its present form. Some people, though, find the original version helpful, so here it is:

3. Observe the breath as it goes in and out, noticing whether it's comfortable or uncomfortable, broad or constricted, obstructed or free-flowing, fast or slow, short or long, warm or cool. If the breath doesn't feel comfortable, change it until it does. For instance, if breathing in long and out long is uncomfortable, try breathing in short and out short. As soon as you find that your breath- feels comfortable, let this comfortable breath sensation spread to the different parts of your body. For example, when you breathe in and out once, think of an important part of the body, as follows:

As you let the breath pass into the bronchial tubes, think of it as going all the way down the right side of your abdomen to the bladder.

As you take another in-and-out breath, think of the breath as going from the main arteries to the liver and heart on down through your left side to the stomach and intestines.

As you take another in-and-out breath, think of the breath as going from the base of the throat all the way down the internal (front) side of the spine.

As you take another in-and-out breath, think of letting the breath go from the base of the throat down the front of your chest through to the tip of the breastbone, to the navel and out into the air.

As you take another in-and-out breath, inhale the breath into the palate down to the base of the throat, on through the middle of the chest to the large intestine, the rectum and out into the air.

Once you've completed these five turns inside the body, let the breath flow along the outside of the body: As you take an in-and-out breath, think of inhaling the breath at the base of the skull and letting it go all the way down the external (back) side of the spine.

Now, if you're male, think first of your right side, both with the legs and with the arms. As you take an in-and-out breath, think of the right buttock and of letting the breath run all the way down the right leg to the tips of your toes.

As you take another in-and-out breath, think of the left buttock and of letting the breath run all the way down the left leg to the tips of your toes.

As you take another in-and-out breath, think of the base of the skull and of letting the breath run

down your right shoulder, along your right arm to the tips of your fingers.

As you take another in-and-out breath, inhale the breath into the base of the skull and let it run down your left shoulder, along your arm to the tips of your fingers.

As you take another in-and-out breath, inhale the breath into the area inside your skull, thinking of your ears—eyes—nose—mouth. (Men should think of the right side first, with each part of the body: the right eye, right ear, right nostril, right arm, right leg, etc.; women the left eye, left ear, left nostril, left arm, left leg, etc.)

Once you've finished, keep careful watch over your breath. Make the breath refined, light and free-flowing. Keep the mind steady and still in this breath. Be thoroughly mindful and self-aware. Let the various breath sensations join and permeate throughout the body. Let the mind be neutral, impassive and well-composed.

Glossary

arahant: A Worthy One or Pure One, i.e. a person whose heart is freed from the effluents of defilement, and is thus not destined for further rebirth. An epithet for the Buddha and the highest level of his Noble Disciples.

ariya sacca: Noble Truth. The word Noble (*ariya*) here can also mean ideal or standard, and in this phrase carries the meaning of objective or universal truth. There are four: stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the path of practice leading to its disbanding.

āsava: Effluent—mental defilements (sensuality, states of being, views and unawareness) in their role as causes of the flood of rebirth.

avijjā: Unawareness, ignorance, obscured awareness, counterfeit knowledge.

āyatana: Sense medium. The inner sense media are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and intellect. The outer sense media are their corresponding objects.

buddha (buddho): The mind's innate quality of pure knowingness, as distinct from the themes with which it is preoccupied and its knowledge about those preoccupations.

dhamma: Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles which underlie their behavior. Also, principles of behavior which human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, Dhamma refers also to any doctrine

which teaches such matters. To view things—mental or physical—in terms of the Dhamma means to view them simply as events or phenomena, as they are directly perceived in and of themselves, seeing the regularity of the principles underlying their behavior. To view them in terms of the world means to view them with regard to their meaning, role or emotional coloring—i.e. in terms of how they fit into our view of life and the world.

dhātu: Element; potential; property; the elementary properties which make up the inner sense of the body and mind: earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (heat), wind (energy or motion), space and cognizance. The breath is regarded as an aspect of the wind property, and all feelings of energy in the body are

classed as breath sensations. According to ancient Indian and Thai physiology, diseases come from an aggravation or imbalance in any of the first four of these properties. Well-being is defined as a state in which none of them is dominant: All are quiet, unaroused, balanced and still.

ekaggatārammaṇa: One-pointedness; singleness of preoccupation.

jhāna: Meditative absorption in a single notion or sensation.

khandha: The component parts of sensory perception; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced: *rūpa* (sensations, sense data), *vedanā* (feelings of pleasure, pain or indifference), *saññā* (labels, names, concepts, allusions), *saṅkhāra* (mental fashionings, thought formations), *viññāṇa* (cognizance).

lokavidū: An expert with regard to the world(s)—an epithet normally used for the Buddha.

magga-citta: The state of mind which forms the path leading to the transcendent qualities culminating in Liberation. *Phala-citta* refers to the mental state which follows immediately on *magga-citta* and experiences its fruit.

nibbāna (nirvāṇa): Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from greed, anger and delusion, from physical sensations and mental acts. As this term is used to refer also to the extinguishing of fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire in a latent state exists to a greater or lesser extent in all objects. When activated, it seizes and adheres to its fuel. When extinguished, it is unbound.)

nimitta: Mental sign or image.

nīvaraṇa: Hindrance. The mental qualities which hinder the mind from becoming centered are five: sensual desires, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety and uncertainty.

pāli: The name of the most ancient recension (survey, review) of the Buddhist canon now extant and—by extension—of the language in which it was composed.

samādhi: Concentration; the act of keeping the mind centered or intent on a single preoccupation. The three levels of concentration—momentary, threshold and fixed penetration—can be understood in terms of the first three steps in the section on *jhāna*: Momentary concentration goes no further than step (a); threshold

concentration combines steps (a) and (c); fixed penetration combines steps (a), (b) and (c) and goes on to include all four levels of *jhāna*.

saṅgha: The community of the Buddha's followers. On the conventional level, this refers to the Buddhist monkhood. On the ideal (*ariya*) level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers—whether lay or ordained—who have practiced to the point of gaining at least the first of the transcendent qualities culminating in Liberation.

saṅkhāra: Fashioning—the forces and factors which fashion things, the process of fashioning, and the fashioned things which result. As the fourth *khandha*, this refers to the act of fashioning thoughts, urges, etc., within the mind. As a blanket term for all five *khandha*, it refers to all things

conditioned, compounded or fashioned by nature. ‘*Saṅkhārūpekkhā-ñāṇa*’ refers to a stage of liberating insight in which all *saṅkhāra* are viewed with a sense of indifference.

vipassanā (-ñāṇa): Liberating insight—clear, intuitive discernment into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them for what they are in terms of the four Noble Truths and the characteristics of inconstancy, stress and ‘not-selfness’.

If anything in this translation is inaccurate or misleading, I ask forgiveness of the author and reader for having unwittingly stood in their way. As for whatever may be accurate, I hope the reader will make the best use of it, translating it a few steps further, into the heart, so as to attain the truth to which it points.

THE TRANSLATOR

Chant for the Dedication of Merit

sabbe sattā sadā hontu
averā sukhajīvino
kataṃ puññaphalaṃ mayhaṃ
sabbe bhāgī bhavantu te

"May all living beings always live happily,
free from animosity.
May all of us share in the blessings
that spring from the good I have done."

Dedication Of Merits

May the merit accrued from this meritorious deed
Be dedicated to all sentient beings
Whether born or unborn or being born
May they be relieved from suffering
May they all attain to the bliss of Nibbāna